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# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



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*The product of a British "public corporation" is an integral and important part of what the U.S. intelligence community reads in its "FBIS."*

## **THE BBC MONITORING SERVICE AND ITS U.S. PARTNER**

**Roland A. Way**

The monitoring of foreign broadcasting stations was developed before the war, as government-controlled radios in Europe came to be used increasingly to publicize official communiques, policy statements by party and government leaders, and propaganda lines. A pioneer in the monitoring field was the British Broadcasting Corporation, a public corporation with a government monopoly on both domestic and external broadcasting and with a Treasury grant-in-aid for its broadcasts to listeners abroad. One of its most important activities was, and remains, the gathering and presentation of news.

In 1939, anticipating the drying up of many normal news sources with the imminent outbreak of war, the BBC determined to tap the news potential of foreign radio broadcasts, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Information began a monitoring operation in Evesham in Worcestershire. Although this operation was primarily a service to the BBC's own news output desks, the armed services and government departments quickly grasped its possibilities as a rapid source of information and encouraged its expansion. Coverage of foreign stations was increased and the material processed was issued to BBC output desks and government departments in daily mimeographed reports and over teleprinter hook-ups. In 1943 the monitoring unit moved to its present location at Caversham Park near Reading, and at the end of the war was reorganized and consolidated on a full peace-time basis under the administrative control of the BBC's External Services, responsible for broadcasts to listeners abroad.

By this time, monitoring of foreign broadcasts had also become a recognized war-time activity of the U.S. Government. The Foreign Broadcast Monitoring (later renamed "Intelligence" and then "Information") Service, which had been organ-

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### *The BBC Monitoring Service*

ized in 1941 under the FCC, placed a small number of editors with the BBC late in that year. This group cooperated with a local unit of the OWI in the selection and transmission to Washington of BBC-monitored material. When the OWI was dissolved in 1946 and FBIS became a Central Intelligence activity, the arrangement to post an American group with the BBC Service at Caversham was made permanent, and the two services entered into a reciprocal agreement for world-wide radio coverage. Under this agreement the BBC assumed responsibility for covering the central Soviet Home Service and Moscow's broadcasts to Europe, most Satellite transmitters and a scattering of stations in Western Europe and the Near and Middle East. FBIS assumed coverage of most of the rest of the world. The product of each service's monitoring is furnished the other by radioteletype in plain text.

The producing staff of the BBC Monitoring Service is distributed among three departments: the Reception Unit tunes in on selected broadcasts and makes summaries or translations from them; the News Bureau picks out "hot" items and writes them up for its wire service; and the Reports Department prepares comprehensive mimeographed reports covering the monitored material. The necessary technical facilities are provided by a section of the BBC Engineering Division. These consist of a primary antenna system on the grounds of Caversham Park, capable of receiving a high proportion of the broadcasts scheduled for monitoring, and a more elaborate intercept center some three miles distant, where those signals not receivable at Caversham are picked up and fed in by land line.

The Reception Unit operates around the clock on a shift system seven days a week. It covers broadcasts from 37 countries in more than 30 languages, processing some 150,000 words a day of the nearly two million it hears. Its schedules are kept under constant review to meet the requirements of BBC output, government departments, and other consumers, including notably the FBIS. Its coverage responsibility continues to embrace the whole critical segment of Moscow broadcasts in Russian and other European languages, as well as some regional Soviet stations, most stations in East Europe, and some in Western Europe and the Near East.

Each monitor is allocated certain broadcasts which he listens to and simultaneously records. Any news flashes he either re-

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ports immediately or transcribes promptly when the broadcast is over. Less urgent material required by the output departments he transcribes or translates into English later from the recording. It is his responsibility to make the preliminary selection of this material, guided by general and particular directives and to a great degree by his own area knowledge and good judgment, ripened by experience. The monitor's transcript is then transferred to a master stencil and reproduced for distribution to the principal receiving offices in the building—the News Bureau, Reports and FBIS editors.

The News Bureau runs the "ticker" of the Monitoring Service. From the broadcast material passed to it by the Reception Unit and that received by teleprinter from FBIS monitoring stations it selects and files some 20,000 words daily to the news departments of the BBC and the Foreign Office.

Production of documents is the responsibility of the Reports Department, which likewise receives the total take from both BBC and FBIS monitoring. A daily Monitoring Report sums up in two to three pages the main lines of emphasis in the previous day's world broadcasting. A special daily report reviews the principal trends of Middle East broadcasting. Summaries of World Broadcasts published bi-weekly cover the USSR, Eastern Europe and the Far East. Supplements to these are published daily or weekly as required: a Far East Economic Supplement is published regularly every week, for example, and a supplement covering the proceedings of the USSR Supreme Soviet appears daily while the meetings are in progress.

The British Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence use the product of the Monitoring Service in much the same way as the Washington intelligence community uses the FBIS wire and publications. Of special import and interest to the Ministry of Defence is a periodic report containing economic information from monitored Soviet regional broadcasts. U.S. intelligence, for its part, is acutely dependent on the products of the British service which it receives through FBIS. FBIS editors stationed at Caversham select for Washington some 50,000 words daily, principally from the vast USSR and East European radio output. This selection contains a large proportion of each day's important world news, press articles, statements of policy, and propaganda.

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The BBC is organized to give speedy, preferential treatment to speeches by national leaders. In preparation for a two-hour address by Khrushchev, for example, the Reception Unit assembles the most experienced members of its Russian team. Before the broadcast begins monitors are assigned to listen to several of the assigned Moscow frequencies and to select one or two of the best. While the speech is in progress, play-by-play highlights are transcribed in English and distributed to the News Bureau and the FBIS editors, who relay them to Washington, by the highest appropriate precedence, through an FBIS wire room in the American Embassy. It is not uncommon that the first takes of these summaries are being read by subscribers to the FBIS Washington ticker before the broadcast from Moscow is completed. Meanwhile at Caversham other monitors have begun a full textual translation of the speech from the recordings. Portions of the finished product are distributed and filed in the same manner as the summaries.

Thanks to the combined efforts of the BBC and FBIS staffs at Caversham and at the London wire room, and to allocated communications channels which permit instantaneous transmission to FBIS Washington, our intelligence consumers come into possession of statements of important world figures with a minimum of delay, often within minutes after their utterance.

The FBIS transatlantic radio channels are two-way streets. While one side of a duplex is carrying BBC-originated material to Washington, the other is carrying to the BBC the selected files from Far East and Latin American radios monitored at FBIS domestic and Far East field stations. The BBC automatically gets the product of FBIS Near and Middle East monitoring on Cyprus, for it supplies the communications link which carries this traffic to London.

"Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation." This motto of the BBC, which has such limited currency in the world today, applies in a striking way to the Anglo-American joint enterprise which listens to words of peace or war broadcast by friends, foes and neutrals. Sixteen years of collaborative efforts have produced an effective instrument for the exploitation on a world-wide basis of this overt and fruitful source of intelligence information. Without BBC partnership, the United States could obtain coverage of indispensable sources only by the construction of new and costly facilities. Despite some differences

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in requirements and procedures, the two services have agreed on principles of operation, reaffirmed in periodic meetings on one or the other side of the Atlantic, which embody a high degree of compatibility and mutual confidence. In the character and scope of its activity and in the closeness of its working relationships, the BBC-FBIS combine affords a possibly unique example of enduring Anglo-American cooperation.

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